



The Four Classic Novels of Ancient China

LIT 301 / PSCI 304

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The objective of this course is to help students to learn Chinese ancient literature through the Four Classic Novels of Ancient China. This course will be composed of four main parts: the first will introduce *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. We will discuss its historical context, the main themes, and the most important characters of the novel, before moving on to *The Outlaws of the Marshes*. After completing our discussion of *Outlaws*, we will turn our attention to the famous *Journey to the West*, before finishing our own journey through Chinese literature by exploring the idiosyncrasies of *Dream of the Red Mansion*. Through deep engagement with these readings, students will learn some of the main traits of Chinese ancient novels. This course will use English translations of the original texts along with a rich systematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of how Chinese ancient literature has influenced Chinese culture and shaped the Chinese people's aesthetics.

GRADING

Any student who misses more than 1/3 of all classes will fail. Failure to complete any of these requirements will result in automatic failure for the course.

- Final Exam 50%
- Writing Assignments on the Readings 30%
- Classroom Participation and Readings 20%

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND FURTHER READINGS

Reading assignments are selected excerpts from the four famous novels. The lecturer may also assign some supplementary readings/assignments over the course of the semester to enhance the students' study of these books.

- *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Luo Guanzhong (14th Century)
- *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, Shi Nai'an (14th Century)
- *Journey to the West*, Wu Cheng'en (16th Century)
- *Dream of the Red Mansion*, Cao Xueqin (18th Century)

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

Week 1: Introduction to Romance of the Three Kingdoms

- Historical context
- Textual variants

Week 2: Selections from Romance of the Three Kingdoms (I)

- Three Bold Spirits Meet in Mutual Faith in the Peach Garden
- Film screening of Chapter 1, Heroes and Champions Win First Honors Fighting the Yellow Scarves



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Week 3: Selections from Romance of the Three Kingdoms (II)

- Cao Cao Warms Wine and Rates the Heroes of Realm
- Lord Guan Takes Xuzhou by Stratagem and Beheads Chezhou

Week 4: Introduction to The Outlaws of the Marshes

- Historical context
- Textual variants

Week 5: Outlaws of the Marshes (I)

- Lord Chai Accommodates Guests in Henghai County
- Wu Song Kills a Tiger on Jingyang Ridge
- Mistress Wang Instigates Ximen Qing
- Film screening of Chapter 25, The Adulterous Wife Poisons Wu the Elder

Week 6: Outlaws of the Marshes (II)

- Wu Song, Drunk, Beats Jiang, the Giant Gate Guard
- Shi En Once More Controls His Mengzhou Establishment

Week 7: Review and Midterm

- Brief Review/Time for covering any missed material
- Midterm

Week 8: Introduction to Journey to the West

- Historical context
- Textual variants

Week 9: Selections from Journey to the West (I)

- Dissatisfaction at Being Appointed Protector of the Horses
- Discontent with the Title of “Equal of Heaven”
- The Tang Priest is Rescued in the Guanyin Temple
- The Great Sage Removes a Monster from Gao Village

Week 10: Selections from Journey to the West (II)

- The Corpse Fiend Thrice Tricks Tang Sanzang
- Film screening of Chapter 27, The Holy Monk Angrily Dismisses the Handsome Monkey King

Week 11: Selections from Journey to the West (III)

- Sanzang’s Way Is Blocked at the Fiery Mountains
- Monkey’s First Attempt at Borrowing the Plantain Fan



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- The Bull Demon King Gives Up the Fight at the Feast
- Monkey Tries a Second Time to Borrow the Plantain Fan
- Zhu Bajie Helps to Defeat a Demon King
- Monkey's Third Attempt to Borrow the Fan

Week 12: Introduction to Dream of the Red Mansion

- Historical context
- Textual variants

Week 13: Selections from Dream of the Red Mansion (I)

- An Ill-Fated Girl Meets an Ill-Fated Man
- A Confounded Monk Solves a Confounding Case

Week 14: Selections from Dream of the Red Mansion (II)

- The Spiritual Stone Is Too Bemused to Grasp the Fairy's Riddles
- The Goddess of Disenchantment in Her Kindness Secretly Expounds on Love
- Baoyu Has His First Taste of Love
- Granny Liu Pays Her First Visit to the Rong Mansion

Week 15: Selections from Dream of the Red Mansion (III) and Final Exam

1. Baochai Chases a Butterfly to the Dripping Emerald Pavilion
2. Daiyu Weeps over Fallen Blossom by the Tomb of the Flower
3. Jiang Yuhuan Gives a New Friend a Scarlet Perfumed Sash
4. Film screening of Chapter 28, Baochai Bashfully Shows Her Red Bracelet Scented with Musk

Final Exam